

AMBASSADOR WALTER F. MONDALE

Interviewed by: David E. Reuther

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Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program interview with Ambassador Walter F. Mondale. It's April 27, 2004 and we are in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm David Reuther.

Ambassador Mondale, you've had a long and distinguished public career as Minnesota State Attorney General, U.S. Senator, Vice President, and presidential candidate. [See biographic sketch at the end of this interview.] It's exciting to delve into all those areas, but our focus today is your association with foreign affairs and the foreign service community and more specifically your service as Ambassador to Japan from August 13, 1993 to December 15, 1996.

To turn to the larger theme of your participation in foreign affairs and experiences with the foreign affairs community, the Foreign Service, do you recall what your first official visit overseas was?

MONDALE: I believe my first official visit was as a young senator to Vietnam. Another one was to a NATO conference in Brussels. Those were back in '65/'66.

Q: You were senator during the Vietnam War period.

MONDALE: Alas.

Q: So foreign affairs issues have in fact been very much on the horizon for you.

MONDALE: Right.

Q: In the United States, when foreign affairs are raised, there are those who talk about boondoggles and argue that Congress should never travel overseas. From the Foreign Service perspective, in the contrary, there is a strong opinion that we should encourage the Congress to travel overseas, to get the representatives of the people out in the field.

MONDALE: I've talked about that many times, that the most dangerous thing to have in America are ignorant members of Congress who haven't traveled, who don't know what's going on in the world, who are unable to relate what we do here to what happens overseas. I think the better members of the Congress are people that have taken trips and taken them seriously and used them as learning experiences to broaden their understanding. I think that's one of the best things that can happen. Now there are boondoggle types. I'm not endorsing them. But most of the members of the Congress I knew took these trips very seriously.

Q: Despite knowing a large Congressional Delegation coming to Thailand just wanted to do some shopping and some touristy things, our Ambassador met them at the airport in a van that had a microphonet and he briefed them for the 40 minute ride in from the airport. He wasn't going to miss that opportunity to educate.

MONDALE: Yes. I admire him and I don't know why those congressmen just came on a shopping trip.

Q: Well, that was his effort, but there have been congressional trips that have gone awry. Have you ever had that experience?

MONDALE: No. I've read about it. I don't remember any trip that I was on that I didn't think wasn't well handled and didn't contribute to learning more about those countries. My experience has been almost entirely positive. As I sit here, I can't think of one bummer of a trip.

Q: As we were saying earlier, you were a senator at the time of Vietnam, which was a major foreign policy issue at that time. From your position as Senator, how did you see the role of yourself as a representative of Minnesota or your position in the Senate on this kind of a foreign affairs issue?

MONDALE: I came into the Senate the last day of 1964. The war was just starting to heat up. I believed and said that this was analogous to Europe, that we didn't stand up to Hitler and he came to cause all that tragedy, and that this was a similar kind of challenge and we had to stand up to North Vietnam and China and so on. I was wrong. But that was how I started out.

For a few years, I supported the war. But as I watched and listened, that 1965 trip to Vietnam helped me to understand. I remember a general taking me aside to say things weren't going well. Some of the reporters covering that war like Johnny Apple from the New York Times and so on started talking to me about what they were seeing and my doubts began to build. So, I didn't go there with a set foreign policy. I didn't go there in any other pose than to learn, see, try to understand better what was going on.

Q: Which is in one sense an interesting description of the way in which the American government operates, that the Executive proposes and the Congress disposes, or reviews and funds. So it took some time for the Congress to come to a certain amount of skepticism?

MONDALE: And that wasn't to our credit at all. When you have American lives involved, you'd better learn rapidly. You'd better know what you're doing. My excuse - and I don't have one - is really that I was brand new, first impressions, listening to our government, believing what I was hearing, and then slowly becoming aware that there was a much more complex and disturbing underpinning to the whole thing.

Q: That is, at some turning point, the issue becomes how do you extract oneself?

MONDALE: Right, not a dissimilar problem to today.

Q: Does history repeat itself, Sir?

MONDALE: A real problem for Americans who wanted to believe, as I did, that we were in there to do the best, that we wanted to reform this country so that things worked. We put out stories of a number of projects we had done and this and that, stories about how the public liked us and so on, but we now know that the public there saw us more as a successor to the French, as people coming in as colonialists trying to gain influence there in order to block the North Vietnamese and so on. We were never able to shake that idea about ourselves in the eyes of the Vietnamese and we paid an awful price learning that lesson.

Q: Moving on chronologically, in 1977, you moved from the Legislative Branch of the government to the Executive Branch when you assumed the position of Vice President. At that time, how was your view of foreign policy altered by your new responsibilities. The executive proposes...Now you're on the other side of the fence.

MONDALE: Right. Carter and I had a long talk right after the election about what I would do as Vice President and there is a document somewhere. We put it in writing. One of my functions was to represent him in foreign policy matters, to travel on his behalf, and to be his eyes and ears on the Hill and his spokesman around the country and so on. I did a lot of that during my 4 years. The first thing I did was that trip right after the inaugural to Western Europe Italy, France, England, and Germany to sort of introduce our new administration and get our agenda started over there. Then I flew to Iceland and Tokyo. A long trip.

Q: It certainly was. What did you see were some of the major foreign policy issues facing the administration as it came in?

MONDALE: Well, the President had some new initiatives. One was, he wanted Germany and so on to back off the nuclear reprocessing technology that they were pursuing in Brazil. And there was another plant somewhere else. He was a nuclear submarine engineer and he wanted to do something to walk back the risks of proliferation. So I took a fairly strong message to Schmidt about the President's concern. In my trip to Italy, the chief message was an economic one, that we thought they had to do something about getting their deficits under control because they had a runaway problem there. In France, it was basically a general discussion... I don't remember that we had a specific hardover point to make. In Japan, what came up... First of all, in England, it was very pleasant because our governments saw eye to eye. In Japan, I was there to say we intended to be an important Asian participant but they brought up the message in a hard way about the Carter statement in our campaign that he was going to withdraw from South Korea. They really delivered a demarche there.

Q: What you are saying is your January 1977 trip was important for the messages you provided to those foreign audiences at that time. In your mind, did this trip also have a domestic component? What were we telling the American people?

MONDALE: Yes. We were trying to show that we were vigorous, that we were going to be engaged, that I was going to be a player helping the President, and that we had new initiatives human rights, nuclear proliferation, and some other matters that needed to be seen as new initiatives by our country and by our folks back home.

Q: I think that's a point that we try to get across, we in the Foreign Service, that you have to have domestic support for what you're doing, sometimes making foreign policy domestic policy for foreigners.

MONDALE: If what you're trying to do is not publicly endurable back home, the chances are, unless real leadership changes the public, it won't endure. So, how the American people feel about fundamental things is central to an effective foreign policy.

Q: Getting to one of the foreign policy issues that arose during your time, in January 1979, the United States normalized relations with the People's Republic of China. Could you describe the administration's domestic and foreign concerns as it approached that decision?

MONDALE: Let me talk about one other thing. On this first trip I took through Europe and Japan, the thing that impressed me was that this was the first trip by a new administration. The plane was packed with representatives of almost every agency that was the American government. The plane was packed. When I got to Tokyo and went into my hotel room, there must have been 100 people there from all over the world from different American agencies who wanted to be around and participate as our administration got started. That sort of surprised me. I think it was a sign of a new administration not knowing how to handle things and not screening what kind of people...who should be there and who was not needed at that time, how different American governmental views should be coordinated and filtered through some process so that we could handle these differently. I had the feeling that the different American agencies had managed to get themselves on that trip because they wanted to show their colors. That's one of the few times I saw things that I was kind of critical of. I thought we were wasting a lot of money and I think it looked funny to the Japanese.

Q: To have such a large delegation.

MONDALE: Well, it was not just the number on the plane, which was really impressive, but by the time I got to that hotel room, I felt I had half of America there.

Q: Something you probably found out later, that of course, the embassy is just a house for the federal government and there are all kinds of agencies in there, some of which the average citizen wouldn't anticipate being there.

MONDALE: Right. Anyway, I just wanted to make that one story. I know you're making this history for the diplomatic service and that's one thing I remember.

Q: Anyway, we were talking about China.

MONDALE: Now we're going to China. That was one of my most important trips. We had had the opening to China about a half a year or a year before when we established... in fact, broke the ice and announced that our presence in Taiwan would be some kind of a foundation, a non-governmental relationship, and that our relationship would be with one China whose capital was Beijing. Following that, we had normalization. Then there seemed to be a kind of a dead spot for 4 or 5 months where we had gotten the bare bones in place but then things were starting to drift downward in stasis. So, my trip was designed to try to get some momentum started in our relationship.

As we prepared for this trip, I did something that I did on all my trips that I thought worked very well. That is, we'd sit down and figure out every conceivable thing that could be an issue in this case with China and every conceivable significant interest that we had pursuing with China and their leaders to serve our national interest. We had a big agenda there because we were trying to open up trade, we were trying to establish a cooperative intelligence relationship, we were trying in this case to get some yet secret cooperation that allowed us to better watch the Soviet Union, we were breaking the ice with a country where it had been awfully icy. So, one of the first things you do when you do that is, you realize that a lot of decisions in our own government that are deadlocked or paralyzed or hidden or unresolved, the intradepartmental disputes and so on, and that was one of the things I could do as Vice President. I could shoot those issues out of there. Then when I came to China, we were really ready. (Secretary of State) Cy Vance has said this was one of the most successful trips in our 4 years.

We took a lagging relationship and turned it around and they really felt good about it, the Chinese did. We worked out Ex-Im Bank credits. We worked out new trade relationships. We developed new rules on export controls that were different than that on the Soviet Union, which they really liked. They allowed me to speak to the University of Beijing on national television. We were able to... I think it really worked and it showed how a vice president can push through changes in the American government so you can come ready to do business. They saw that and it made a big difference.

Q: The other part of that goes back to something we were talking about earlier in terms of public acceptance of policy. Obviously, you'd have to sell normalization with China. Much academic writing has covered the way in which normalization was presented and rationalized. I would suspect that you would agree with the idea that you understood that there was going to be political opposition from the legislature and that in handling that issue you had to be very cognizant of your public support.

MONDALE: Oh, yes, and I was there on the night that the President made his announcement on his dramatic change of policy toward Taiwan and toward China. I was there with Brzezinski and the others when we told what might be called the "Taiwan lobby" what the new situation was. They were furious. They had said that we had promised to consult with them if there were any changes and here we were telling them 2 minutes before the President went on the air to announce it. It was a sign of what was going to come. It was not well received by those who had these ideas about Taiwan. There was an old part of America that identified with Taiwan, hated China, didn't see any chances of reform there. But I would say, overall, the policy was well received in America at large, that they liked the idea of ending this impasse between our 2 nations, they liked the idea of engaging, trying to improve relationships, exchanges, and all the rest, and doing business. By and large, we had that residual resentment that I've described, but overall, the policy was very well received in America.

Q: One of the advantages of your trip was to help focus both our organizations and their organizations on the policy change. At this time, I was negotiating the aviation agreement. I was on the China desk at that time. We were also negotiating a maritime agreement with them. They wanted to do something that we thought was very strange. They wanted an annex to the agreement that would list the ports that US ships could go to, but it had to be equivalent. Well, we have 3 coasts: the Atlantic, the Gulf, and the Pacific. They have a single coast. So, we thought, "How are we going to balance this out?" Finally one of the Chinese negotiators took me aside and said, "This is a mechanism for us to communicate to the provinces and the cities that this is real," that they would have to begin to prepare themselves to receive American shipping and in doing that, that would prove to them that the policy change was real, it wasn't temporary. So they were having their own issues with getting local government and the public on board with the policy. So, I've always thought the normalization policy with China was a fair illustration of your domestic audience and your foreign audience and getting those policies in line.

MONDALE: Right. And that was going on in both countries. We were there, but I think that that trip really changed some perceptions over there. One of the things we did was open up that consulate in Shanghai that you were involved in, once again, trying to put flesh on the bones and show that we were serious about this. I still feel very good about that trip.

Q: It was really exciting to backstop you on the desk.

MONDALE: It was really fun. You had that whole generation of top Chinese career officials who had gone through the terrible days of the last days of Mao Zedong.

Q: The Cultural Revolution.

MONDALE: Yes, and they were finally passed it, and many of them had been victims but were now in government again. Many of them felt especially close to us and felt really good about the fact that America was coming in there now and changing things. We heard many stories about the Cultural Revolution.

Q: At the same time in a different spot on the globe, you had the whole changing government in Iran that we had to adjust to. The administration let the Shah into the United States. That was a trigger for a whole bunch of events in Iran. How do you recall the decision to let the Shah into the United States?

MONDALE: Very painful issue. William Shawcross' *The Shah's Last Ride* about what he went through the last few months. The President was concerned and said so at least in private that if we let the Shah into America, it might trigger a reaction in Iran and I believe there were some American officials in our Iranian office that had communicated their concerns to the State Department. Carter was very concerned about that. In his book, he writes about how people were encouraging him to allow the Shah in for health care and he asked them all, "If the Iranians react negatively, if they should seize our State Department officials there and make them hostages, then what is your policy?" The room went dead, if not ashen.

Kissinger was very heavily involved in here, calling around. David Rockefeller was very heavily involved. There were others, I'm sure, but those were the ones that I remember because at least Kissinger called me personally, and he called a lot of people personally, saying that not to allow the Shah in was a national disgrace, that America is not a police state, the Iranian radicals are trying to isolate him, but the man is sick and he should be able to come to a hospital that can do something for him. That idea carried the day. I must say, I went along with it at the end because I found it humiliating that these people could press the United States to do something that was really different than the openness that is so essential to our country. But what Carter feared happened and really changed our lives and may have been fundamentally responsible in throwing us out of office.

Q: Paid a fairly high price.

MONDALE: Well, others paid a higher price, but once that revolution started and our hostages were taken, we were largely... Try as we will, we couldn't find a pattern for their release. We tried the ill-fated rescue mission. The rest is history. It really sort of consumed us for the better part of a year or maybe more.

Q: That's an interesting observation. Does that happen at that level of decision-making that an issue can be so consuming and takes up your time and other issues fall off?

MONDALE: It wasn't that we wouldn't have time to do other things. We did. It's that the international environment wasn't willing to think about other things. Being vulnerable as we were with our hostages, other countries knew we were vulnerable. This was a good time for them to negotiate on things they wanted. Our adversaries knew we were pinned down there and they, too, thought this was a nice new spring of opportunity for them. The news about this swamped everything. If you wanted to start a new initiative, people learning about Iran, that's when "Nightline" started as a program reporting on the Iran hostage situation and they had a program that ran every day to make certain that "Nightline" got a good show at our expense, burning flags or moving of our people around blindfolded and all that stuff that we remember. So, it wasn't that we couldn't do other things. It was that the sort of milieu that ensued from the capture of our hostages and the way they played the game really paralyzed us. I forget the timing right now, I think that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was part of that.

Q: That was the same timeframe.

MONDALE: It weakened our image of strength, no question about it.

Q: Of course, what you just said is: reputation is part of one's power.

MONDALE: Right. It's something that I think is hard to explain to people who haven't been through it. The moral stature of America, the integrity with which we stand for the values that we claim as being central to our being herhuman rights and social justice, international stability and peace where we can find iall those things are, in ways that are almost palpable when you're in the diplomatic service or where I was, things that work in your direction when you have them and weaken you when you don't. Because so much of what goes on is based on trust or it's based on respect or it's based on their publics having confidence in us and who we are and in our strengths, and with it a lot of things are possible. Without it, America's power just seeps away. It's something that has to be remembered, particularly by those in America today who think that every American problem in the world can be answered with military power. There are things that have to be answered by military power, but there is a lot of things in how people think, how they view us, whether they respect us, what they understand us as being, and so on that has a lot to do with where we're going to be able to go.

Q: Because ultimately you're living in a community, albeit an international community, and you need everybody to work together.

MONDALE: Yes, and you might be well to remember that they're human beings, too, and they have feelings, too, and they're proud of their country mostly, too, and they want to have respect and be seen as something also.

Q: In the State Department every year we work on what national leader gets to come to the White House for an appropriate meeting and this is a valuable commodity for which the State Department is gatekeeper. Such a visit is prestige thing, but it actually builds on reputation and it's a human community building thing. The foreign leader doesn't walk out of that with anything more than the prestige of having had the meeting.

MONDALE: I had a friend of mine in Japan who was coming to the United States tell me that he was coming here because Washington was the "capital of the world," that they viewed America at the center of civil power in the world and the relationship between the 2 of us was that fundamental. When a Japanese leader comes to the United States, when they have the White House dinner or they go to Camp David (Maryland) or now Crawford (Texas) or somewhere else, that's a matter of enormous significance not only to the guy who does it but to the nation he represents.

Q: This is why I found it interesting that after Tiananmen Square you didn't have an exchange of US or Chinese leaders for 8 years.

MONDALE: It was a sad thing for a lot of reasons. It was really sad for those of us who had worked on the relations to see the thing just turn to ashes there. Very bad.

Q: Let's jump back and finish off. When you were Vice President, the administration placed considerable emphasis on human rights in foreign affairs. What would you say were the domestic origins of that policy and what were the issues in implementing that policy?

MONDALE: Carter had, in effect, announced that in his inaugural address. He said, "Because we are free, we must fight for freedom everywhere." It had a religious basis. He felt that every person was entitled to the dignity of being a human being and protection of human rights. He may have calculated that it was good politics back home, but I think he saw that it helped express to our nation and abroad what he felt he and the nation should be about. This whole thing of pushing human rights was very, very deep in him and it showed up time and time again. I was very heavily involved in it.

You know, Carter was not a guy to spend much time on political calculations. In fact, he didn't like it. I used to tell people, "Don't go in there and argue with him that he should do something because it's good politics. He'll say, 'No.'" He wanted to have an administration that reasoned about what was right, and did it, and then let the politics develop from that. I'm sure he's answered this question. I think that he felt that placing America vigorously on the side of human rights was right whatever happened in politics. I think he felt that America would gain stature around the world because that's what people wanted. Indeed, all of the countries that we confronted the Soviet Union, the apartheid South Africa, the Argentine junta, Chilean junta, the Marcos' in the Philippines, every one of them didn't go on for a long time. When Americans traveled around those areas, they're respected because they remember that we were on the public's side when they had these rotten governments. So, I think history has vindicated Carter.

I'm certainly proud of what we did. Just hope that the following administrations will pursue it. I remember one of those Soviet thugs coming through. He was on the Politburo. I forget his name, but he was a profoundly unimpressive. And he complained to Carter that when we pushed human rights, that we didn't realize that we had poor and hungry people in America and that we should deal with that first. Carter said, "I agree with you completely. When you go out from here, you'll find a lot of press in front there and they'll want to talk to you and I hope you'll criticize us for not doing enough for the poor. That's a very good point."

Q: You were saying you had a lot to do with the policy. Could you elaborate on that?

MONDALE: I saw myself as someone who helped the President. I wasn't an assistant president. I wasn't a co-president. I wasn't a prime minister. I wasn't any of those things. And those issues are things to be considered today, where I think there has been a shift here. But I was engaged. I had access to the same information the President had. I had the President's daily brief. I was invited to every meeting. I was entitled and encouraged to talk to anybody I wanted to. Before I went on these trips, I would call State Department specialists and leaders to help me and the Defense Department, Treasury, every what you want, and we'd work on those and when I went overseas, principals would travel with me, so we had what we needed as we traveled. But what I didn't do and I think it's very important for a Vice President not to do, is to big foot the career government in our own government. In order for that process to work properly, our specialists and policymakers throughout the government should be permitted to send their views up the ranks and they should bperhaps not all of them but the ones that are worthy of iventilated somewhere up there in the policy level. If a Vice President comes in and says, "This is our position," before that process has matured, I think a lot of people think that's the President talking and it chills what should be an open and vibrant consultative process within the government. That's what I tried to do. In other words, I would have my discussions with my friends and others, but if there was something that I didn't like, I'd just go and talk to the President. I never did that in public. Or maybe Brzezinski, maybe Vance I'd talk to. But I always tried to respect the fact that it was the President that had to make the call and that's who I had to talk to if I thought something should be changed.

Q: In implementing the human rights policy, was there appropriate support from the Legislative side of the government? Obviously there were going to be budget implications and organizational implications. The State Department was reorganized at that time.

MONDALE: Right. I would say that there was some bafflement at first about what the President meant by this, what kind of strength and tangibility it would have, and how he would balance hard-nosed security issues against this broad human rights goal. There were some who publicly charged that it was a kind of pious, idealistic, unrealistic sanctimoniousness that was hurting the country. I think that with time we found out that it was actually a very good policy. It helped us be understood and respected around the world. When those kids at Tiananmen Square used the Statue of Liberty as their symbol, I think it said a lot about what young people around the world thought about us. Today, thanks to that, in South Africa, the leadership respects us. Carter often talked about going to Argentina and Chile later and he could feel people. We heard from many number of members of the former Soviet Union who said that Carter's speeches, his receiving some of the dissidents in the White House, the letter he sent to Sakharov, really had a tremendous impact on encouraging and strengthening the move toward removing the Soviet Union. I believe it was one of the truly high points of the Carter administration. I had the distinct joy of working on a lot of this stuff, particularly with Prime Minister Vorster and those guys down in South Africa.

Q: What did that work consist of?

MONDALE: Well, I met Vorster in conference in Vienna in '77/'78. We had a 2 or 3 day real shootout there when I told him that we could not have good relations unless they got rid of apartheid, that what they were doing was destroying chances for their own people and we as a nation were no longer going to be seen as accepting it. There had been a kind of a cynical policy toward those apartheid nations where at least one ambassador told me that our leaders had told him, "Just keep this stuff off the front pages. We don't want to hear about it." Well, we were taking a different position. We wanted it on the front page. We wanted these issues confronted by those governments. When Mandela finally was released from prison, I think at some point he said something about American policy having encouraged him and the others. I don't know if your records have that meeting with Vorster, but it was really. Talk about hard-nosed diplomacy, that was really something. I was an old civil rights worker myself. He'd bring up all of this crap that we used to hear from segregationists. "Well, can they do it? They don't want to. They don't know how to handle their own affairs. They don't know how to deal with money. They're not smart" and so on. Boy, I could relive my whole life with them again. I was under orders from Carter to let him have it, so I did.

Q: That must have been a bracing moment.

MONDALE: Loved it. (end of tape)

Q: Let's jump forward to your ambassadorship to Japan. You took up your post as ambassador in August '93. This is a post at which there's been a long tradition of non-Foreign Service people being the ambassador. How did this opportunity to be ambassador arise for you? Obviously you were a senior member of the...

MONDALE: Well, Clinton had asked me to be ambassador to Russia and I accepted and then called him back the next day and said I didn't think so. I figured that was the last I'd ever hear from him. But in about 3 months or so, Christopher called and asked me whether I might be interested in being looked at as ambassador to Japan. I said, "Yes, I'd like that." I was selected.

Q: How did you hear? Who called you?

MONDALE: I think the first guy to call was Brian Attwood, who was in the State Department. He's now the dean of our Humphrey Institute. I said, "Well, Brian, you can put my name in there, but I don't want it speculated on publicly. I don't need that at my age." So, of course, he said, "Nobody will know about it" and it was in the paper that afternoon. What's new?

Q: Is America a great country or what?

MONDALE: Yes, it's wonderful. There were some others that were interested. I don't know how the process went, but I'm told that Christopher came down on my side, he said he thought he could work best with me. I had had a good relationship with Clinton. I don't think he had problems with it. So, off I went.

Q: Most of our interviews are with career people. We don't often get into "How did you prepare yourself for this once it was official" because there is a number of very unique steps in this process. Just the announcement that you're going to be the nominee is...

MONDALE: Yes. This is me talking about myself, but I have had a lifetime style of really soaking in things. In other words, if I'm going to do something like this, I want to read it all, I want to hear from the best, I want to sort through and weigh the issues and how they might work out, the politics of the thing and so on. So, from June or so to August while I was going through the vetting process and the confirmation process and the rest, I had any number of meetings with State Department officials, with think tanks in Washington. I went up to Harvard, Columbia universities. I was out at the University of Washington and maybe Stanford. I spent a lot of time digging into this stuff. A lot of people came to see me like Haru Reischauer, the widow of Edward L. Reischauer, who is a relative of ours. She came... She's the first one to tell me I was going to be ambassador. There was a leak somewhere and she came out here and we spent a couple days together and she gave me the books I was supposed to read. You've Got to Have Wa. So, we spent an awful lot of time on that. Then I started to connect with the career people that were going to help me: Bill Breer, Russ Deming, Desaix Anderson, Japanologists that could help me better understand what I was going to handle. So that's what I did.

Q: So then the confirmation with the Senate was pretty perfunctory?

MONDALE: It was wonderful.

Q: Some people you'd met before.

MONDALE: Oh, yes, and everybody... Bob Dole came in. The old Jesse Helms was for me. It all worked out very well.

Q: The first time you arrived in Japan was the trip as Vice President?

MONDALE: I think I was there once or twice as a senator.

Q: Probably going through on your way to Vietnam.

MONDALE: Yes, I did, and Reischauer was the ambassador once in '65, something like that. Of course, Joan was related to him, so I stayed at the embassy and I talked to Reischauer. So I had been there, I think, twice, as a senator.

Q: Now you're walking in the door... You were in charge of the place.

MONDALE: Yes. It's different.

Q: Who's there? Who's in this house of the American federal government?

MONDALE: Let me begin by summarizing. It was about as impressive a group of people as I've ever seen, as committed, as knowledgeable, as helpful, with a good spirit. It really makes you feel good to be an American. They were so good. Many of them are still my friends. Still got somebody coming into town next week. We're all getting together to talk about old stories. If the American people could have seen what I saw, they'd feel a lot better about how they're being represented.

I started out with Bill Breer, my DCM, and I asked him to stay on a couple of months to get me started. I asked Russ Deming to come over to be my DCM following that period. I forget just what the timing was. So, Bill helped me get started. He'd been there under Armacost and is an old Japan hand. Peggy Breer was very good to Joan, helping her get started, as was Russ Deming. Then I got to know all the station chiefs and department heads in my embassy. I would have the morning meetings. We'd have the issue conferences. We'd meet in the auditorium and talk about questions. It's a big embassy. Because there's a lot of American military over there, you've got a whole additional section that deals with that. A big commercial relationship, a big section dealing with that. A big immigration flow. All this stuff. And several significant consulates around the nation and several significant military bases. So, there was a lot to learn. Incidentally, the commander of the US Forces Japan was a guy named Dick Meyers and his assistant was a guy named Pete Pace, who are still in the business. [Editor's Note: General Richard B. Myers, USAF, became the fifteenth Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Oct. 1, 2001. From November 1993 to June 1996 General Myers was Commander of U.S. Forces Japan and 5th Air Force at Yokota Air Base, Japan. General Peter Pace, USMC was advanced to Major General on June 21, 1994, and was assigned as the Deputy Commander/Chief of Staff, U. S. Forces, Japan. He is currently the Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.]

Q: They are. General Pace was just in the papers the other day. But isn't that just the point? The public really doesn't understand that... If you ask the general public, "Oh, it's the State Department overseas," but in fact, it's the house for the federal government and it's one way of defining what issues are important with that country because you have the Commerce Department there or the Treasury Department or the FBI...

MONDALE: Or the Ag(riculural) Department or the Department of Energy or the National Science Foundation, all of that, that broad range of government agencies.

Q: The embassy in Tokyo has a science section?

MONDALE: It did and I think it still does. One of the first things an outsider like me had to learn was that what appeared to be kind of a single agency running the embassy, the State Department, was in fact that plus all these separate agencies represented by their people. Although you have the famous President's letter to all of them, that "You're it and you can throw people out of the country and so on," it doesn't work that way and you have to develop cooperative attitudes and respect to make it work.

Q: Just as an illustration of that, at the time that you were there, there were some major commercial and economic issues: auto parts and Kodak.

MONDALE: Insurance. We had a lot of tough economic issues.

Q: How did these issues come before you? Was there a pressure group back in Washington and...

MONDALE: Most of the issues arose either from the STR (U.S. Special Trade Representative) or from Commerce, maybe from the State Department. We were having yawning current account and trade deficits, a strong belief existed that there was widespread mercantilism at work. Under Mickey Kantor and some others, they were trying to do something about it. So, these issues, the main ones were cars, car parts, insurance, construction, some intellectual property issues, foreign direct investment issues, a long list.

Q: And if it isn't issues in Japan, it's their investment in the United States. In fact, doesn't that sort of illustrate that countries don't interact on a single issue or two; they interact over such a broad range of circumstances that that's why you call it "managing the relationship."

MONDALE: And that's why one issue is rarely isolatable from other issues. If it's significant at all, they relate to each other and they push the agenda of what's possible. So, if you really pressure trade issues, you might have security issues or other kinds of questions that come up that will be presented in a way that's not as favorable as if you didn't have those issues. So, whenever you press another nation to do something that's significant, you have to ask not only what is it that you want and how you'd be glad to get it, but what is it that you might have to pay, perhaps elsewhere or in the relationship itself, and is that worth what you're asking for.

Q: When you first arrived in '93, how would you characterize the temperature of the relationship?

MONDALE: I thought it was good but a little anxious because the underlying elements of the relationship were and remained very solid. Both democracies, a strong economic trade relationship, a treaty alliance that worked and was very strong, common interests. Japan and the United States worried about Russia or other security threats in the region meeting each other, all those things. I thought it was very good. The edginess was arising over basically trade. By the time I got there, there had been already a couple of dustups over trade. I forget what we called those... We wanted some kind of guidelines to measure our progress. The Japanese government under the previous Bush Administration had agreed to a certain number of cars that were going to be sold over there and they wanted to get off that idea right away. We weren't asking for numerical guidelines, but we wanted some kind of measurement of progress. So, by the time I got there, that was getting a little bit edgy. But the rest of the relationship I thought was excellent.

Q: Of course, the guidelines are helpful not only for you to calibrate how you're going, but it allows you to go back to the US and say to interested parties there, "Yes, we have accomplished this. We're sharing with you our guidelines."

MONDALE: But I also think that trade is a very touchy and potentially explosive issue. It's not a one, two-step between demanding something of another country, getting public support back home, and everything being positive. People are worried about it. Pressing these policies too hard will lead to a damaged commercial and economic relationship. It could lead to irresponsible protectionism. That the market will take care of these things better than government can take care of them. I would say that after a couple years of fairly intense US-Japan trade tension is something that should be studied by scholars to see what we learned from it. Progress was made in the specific issues but what did we learn? I wish somebody would study that.

Q: Because there is always Newton's third rule of physics in that for every action you make, you are getting a reaction out of the other side. He has his domestic concerns.

MONDALE: Right. And the essence of diplomacy is trying to understand their needs as well as your own in seeing how you can align them and make it easier for both sides.

Q: Which I suspect is not all that different from the legislative skills of a senator.

MONDALE: No.

Q: If you've got to get your bill through...

MONDALE: If these politically-appointed ambassadors that we sent over there, like Mansfield and myself and Baker and Foley, bring anything, it's that we spent a lifetime trying to see how the process works and you're no good at that game unless you first understand what the other side must have and try to find common ground.

Q: One of the contentious issues, or one of the issues that had to be managed with some sophistication, of course was the U.S. military presence on Okinawa.

MONDALE: Right, a terrible question.

Q: How did you and your staff work with that?

MONDALE: What brought the issue to a head on my watch was the rape of a 12-year old girl by three members of the U.S. military. The public outrage against it was very understandable and shared by me. But within a few days, it had morphed into that issue to be sure but beyond that into the question of whether Americans should withdraw from Okinawa or at least sharply reduce its presence there, change the SACO guidelines to permit easy access and prosecution of American soldiers. For a while, it was really very tense around there. There is so much historic resentment in Okinawa toward the huge presence of American forces there that it was an issue that readily metastasized, not only just Okinawa but in a large part of the country.

We spent the better part of a year walking that thing backwards or sideways so that we could make the changes that we could make but keep our security presence there. And we made a lot of changes, including agreeing on conditions to close Futenma. So that was a big issue. The Japanese government wanted to come out where we did. There was never any question. In the privacy of my discussions with their leaders, they didn't want this to fracture. They didn't want to kick us out of Okinawa. They wanted to get this thing back to some kind of stability, but they were politicians and they had to deal with it, too.

Q: And I would suspect that they were coming to you in part saying, "Can you help us out in the case for our own people?"

MONDALE: Right. And we had many meetings with the specialists, with political leaders... Kono, now the speaker, was the foreign minister. Hashimoro and some of the others were around. We would have many meetings trying to figure out how to reduce tensions. The agreement on the Futenma base was the biggest thing, but we also agreed to reduce our footprint in Okinawa, to reduce a number of marchings on streets and ammunition practices and artillery practices and parachute landing practices, and in many ways try to be less obtrusive there. While we didn't change the SACO rules, we did agree that where there was commissions of crimes of high morale something (I forget the exact word) that we would allow easier access to the charged party.

Q: On the part of the Japanese police.

MONDALE: Right. Baker got this. We insisted that it be an American lawyer around. They didn't want that. That's now been agreed to.

Q: What you're talking about is the SACO...

MONDALE: Strategic Action Committee on Okinawa. SOFA is the Status of Forces Agreement. That's the one where they prescribe how criminal matters should be handled.

Q: Yes, what each government's authority is.

MONDALE: Right. And those things are difficult because it's not just how they're handled in Japan, but if you change it in Japan, every other country where there are American troops will say, "Hey, here we are."

Q: "How come he got that and we didn't?"

MONDALE: Right.

Q: And so there is always the pressure for a common level of approach.

MONDALE: Right.

Q: Also at that time there were the defense guidelines worked up between ourselves and the Japanese, which was to try to get to a different issue in the security relationship of interoperability... What were some of the issues?

MONDALE: There had been some guidelines that were in being that had been issued in '87 or something like that, but they were toothless, they didn't really give much instruction. I think what had happened, the way I remember it, was that we got into some really tense relationships with North Korea. In '94, there was a time there where we were actually preparing for the worst and making plans for moving refugees into Japan and building up American forces in Japan and in South Korea and maybe going to war. That opened up a whole range of private discussions with the Japanese about how we cooperate, about whether these things are prohibited, acts of collective defense, and whether we could buy supplies from them, and whether we could use some other bases or ports, and whether they could help us, say, with mine sweepers and things like that, and if we were attacked defending Japan, could they come to our defense, and that sort of thing. The answers were not there. Neither country thought the answers were there. And so we spent the better part of a year and a half grinding away on those questions. Then in April of 1996, we had one of the most successful U.S.-Japan summits ever. Clinton came over and we signed the guidelines, the defense agreement, and several other agreements, that I think brought a lot of these issues to a very strong resolution.

Q: But isn't that interesting. Here you're ambassador. The average person would think that you're responsible for bilateral US-Japanese relations only, yet a stimulus comes from afar, from the Korean Peninsula, into this bilateral focus and you then have to work together with the Japanese government to adjust to this outside situation.

MONDALE: Right. Not a bad point because it really underscores the fact that while you may think your job is the U.S. ambassador to Japan, in fact, because of that you get involved in all kinds of regional issues that bear on how Japan fits with those other countries. You don't run Japan, but together you're talking and working to resolve these issues in a way that together makes a solution more practicable. So, North Korea is a very good example. It still dogs that part of the world. I think one of the many reasons why Japan and the United States are very close is they share a common fear of what an irresponsible North Korea might do.

Q: Might do and the end result might be. You were talking about evacuations into Japan.

MONDALE: Right. With the missiles that we now know they have. If they have nuclear weapons as is speculated, it's not just "over there." They could hit us over here. So there's a lot of reasons why we're concerned about this with the Japanese.

Q: Let's look at the Korean situation a little bit. As you were saying, in '94, things seemed to be spiraling down. The North Koreans withdrew some of their nuclear promises and whatnot. Former President Carter goes to Korea. Did you know he was going?

MONDALE: His first visit to Kim Il Sung was June of '94. I was over there. I think he came by Tokyo on the way out and he told me about what he had talked about. He was very hopeful that this would help resolve the North Korean issue, that they were willing to open up peninsula talks, they were willing to put strength behind the idea that there should be no nuclear weapons on the peninsula, that Kim Il Sung was ready to talk to his counterpart in South Korea, that they would return American bodies still there from the Korean War, and Carter thought he had made good connections there and there was going to be...

Q: His trip in the first place was a little unsettling to some people.

MONDALE: It was, not to everybody.

Q: Only those who were responsible for the policy at the moment. But before he went, did he pass through Tokyo? Were you aware what he was doing, outside of what the newspapers were saying?

MONDALE: I'm not sure. I remember talking to him about it. I remember him telling me how it had gone with Kim Il Sung. He talked to me on the way out. I'm trying to remember whether he did also on the way in and I can't remember.

Q: That was a very interesting intervention on his part.

MONDALE: And this is a good thing for the State Department to ponder. The fact of it is that Carter's talk with Kim Il Sung came at the last moment that that was possible. He was soon dead. Carter came back through Tokyo on his way for the second trip. On the way out to the airport, he was informed that Kim Il Sung had just died. But that first trip opened up commitments and possibilities, but even people who didn't want Carter to go later used to try to influence the son when he took over. So, I think that what you have there is the special prominence and stature in this case of a former President who can gain access with a guy like Kim Il Sung and have serious, multi-day discussions about things that none of us could have talked to him about. But in the doing of it, how does our government control the brief that the President uses? How do you tell a former President, "Here's your talking points. Here's what you can say?" To get the best out of people like that, we have to find ways of doing both. I think there's strength there that sometimes the traditional diplomatic system can't fully reach.

Q: And in part, that's why we have politically appointed ambassadors because you're trying to send a special message or create a special bond.

MONDALE: I think one of the things that helped me a lot was the feeling by the Japanese government that I had access back home, that if there was something that was important to the relationship, that I could get into the highest levels, I could talk to the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and do what had to be done to make certain that my concerns about our relationship or about various things would be heard expeditiously at the highest level. That in turn gave me an improved ability to work with the Japanese leaders. Everybody I've talked to like Baker and Foley and Mansfield felt that that was a big edge and advantage.

Q: That's a big edge, and did you use it?

MONDALE: Yes, I did. Not every day, but if I thought there was something compelling, I would go to the President, I would go to Christopher. I remember talking with (Secretary of Defense) Perry many times about this defense guidelines and Futenma decision, we worked almost every day... That's an exaggeration, but whenever I wanted him, I'd call him.

Q: And Sak Sakoda and people from Perry's office would be out there.

MONDALE: And I remember one day the vice minister wanted to know something about a policy that we had in the UN that wasn't apparent from the stories, so I called (Ambassador to the United Nations) Madeline (Albright) and in a half hour call back and said, "Madeline Albright tells me that this is what they want." He said, "That's very helpful." That's one thing you can do.

Q: We're talking about third country issues that impact on US-Japanese relations. Another one that came up at that time was the Senkaku Islands imbroglio. How did that unfold?

MONDALE: Either it was some Japanese that went out and occupied one of those little dots on the ocean-

Q: And put a lighthouse on it.

MONDALE: Well, there was two different island disputes. One was the Senkakus and the other was the islands down around the Philippines. The Senkaku islands, I think it was either Japanese or Chinese that went out there, in effect staking sovereignty claims through their private actions over these islands. The question was, well, what is the American policy toward the Senkakus? Is it a part of the administered areas referred to under the treaty with Japan? Or is it separate from that and thus more eligible for Chinese claims of sovereignty? That issue came up. I made inquiry back home about what I could reliably tell the Japanese government. I was told reliably from our own government that the Senkakus were a part of the administered area and I called the vice minister at the foreign ministry and told him so.

Q: That's actually our standard response, isn't it, that we don't draw other people's borders?

MONDALE: No, but we have this unique relationship with Japan and we have a treaty in which we pledge to defend Japan that refers to "administered areas," areas that we administered after World War II as part of our occupation, and this issue comes up every 2-3 years over there. I saw it came up again the other day. The same answer.

Q: But isn't that an interesting aspect of international relations, that issues will repeat, that you have tradeoffs?

MONDALE: Yes.

Q: Which leads me to ask, one of an ambassador's jobs is creating an image of the United States in the country that you're resident in. How did you rate the embassy resources for the job of public diplomacy on Japan and what did you do to assist that?

MONDALE: I thought the people working there were wonderful. I really enjoyed it. My wife was active in the arts and there was a group of people in that side of the embassy that worked very closely and she was able to do what she wanted. They loved it. Everything you do every day is part of this public. You go out and give speeches. You travel around the country. You meet with their leaders. You meet with various groups from Japan. You write articles for the newspaper. You hold news conferences. You go over and see the prime minister or the cabinet secretary or this person or that person. The idea is to create a public presence and the development of public issues in a way that strengthens the relationship.

Q: How about the resources for the embassy to do that?

MONDALE: I was somewhat disappointed in that. We were going through a time of budgetary restraint. We weren't quite there yet, but we were about to go through this issue of whether USIA (United State Information Agency) was separate or to be folded within the State Department, which created some anxiety in the USIA. We had closed the cultural consulate in Kyoto, which I thought was a terrible idea. It had been there for 40 years. They had tried to close the one in Sapporo. I think they got it back, but I was fighting rear guard action all over trying to protect the little presence we had. They closed a lot of the libraries down before I got there and while I was there. The people we had were very talented, but we didn't have much of a budget to work on with a country that size. I thought, not with many of them, but with a few of them, that some... I'm saying this because I know these things are important to the State Department. Most everybody in the embassy worked with us very closely but there was an attitude on the part of a couple of USIA officers not most of them that they were truly independent and separate and to get involved with us, to promote policies, was a corruption of their independent role as the tribunes of truth. So, I had a couple of get together meetings with them about that.

Q: We're talking about the consulates... So what's one consulate?

MONDALE: Oh, I think they're very important. In many ways, per capita, they have more clout than maybe the embassy. That consulate down in Naha, Okinawa, is tremendous. The one up in Sapporo is very important. These consulates have on the ground in touch relationships. I remember when the State Department was going to close Sapporo because of budget reasons, the governor of Hokkaido came down to see me. He said, "We've made a decision. We'll pay for it. Don't close it. We'll pay for it. We want you here."

Q: And I think that's something a lot of people don't understand. Oh, well, gosh, you have an embassy, you can read the national newspaper and therefore you're fully informed.

MONDALE: A lot of people think it's kind of striped pants cultural feet arrogance. In fact, it's the most fundamental kind of connectivity that really helps sew our relationships together.

Q: Particularly among democracies.

MONDALE: And it's people with language skills, with cultural background, with a sense of history, many of them over the years have developed a connection of contacts and friends and sources of information and advice that is invaluable to our country.

Q: You were talking about President Clinton stopping by one time. There was a couple of times when he skipped Tokyo on trips to Asia.

MONDALE: Clinton for the record was in Japan more often and for more hours by far than any other president in the history of the United States. But this was after I left... He took a trip to China with Hillary and their daughter and he turned it into an official trip but also sort of a tourist trip, which is fine, but he should have come back to Japan and he didn't. That was duly noted in Japan and was not good.

Q: Those are the kinds of things that can set the groundwork or set up some tremors.

MONDALE: Right. When he came there in '96, he was stunning. I've never seen a public leader capture the affection of people like he did. You could just feel it. It was throbbing. I'm sorry that a later venture diminished some of that.

Q: We've been talking about the use of consulates and whatnot.

To start a summation, what do you see as the role of an embassy overseas and the kinds of things that it can do? They're always under budget pressures.

MONDALE: I think that's a good place to begin. We need to see the value of these things. Fulbright liked to say how 40 years of Fulbright scholarships, with all that meant, cost less than half a Polaris submarine. We're talking about money, but in terms of the size of our nation, the wealth of our nation, the issues that we have at stake, the cost of our diplomacy, the very modest expenditure and the most productive yield of almost anything we do, I think we have a question of not only what's spent but what we get for it. I'm told that Powell has been very good about this and that people love him for that. I do, too, if that's what he's done because he was in a position where he could leverage.

We were slipping. I think when I left, the real support for diplomacy in our budget had dropped in real terms by almost 50% over the last 15 years. The nominal amounts were there, but inflation had eroded it there. A terrible thing. And we were cutting things. At one time when the yen got really expensive, our whole embassy and their families couldn't even go out at night to go see a movie. They had no money. A great nation like ours, hamstrung. So I think that it's one of the best things we do. We need to be better at it. We need to work to improve the morale of these officers so they know we know they're important. We need to support their education so they get the languages and the background that really helps them become good officers. I believe that the overly prompt rotation that's the way I saw it of skilled young career officers was a mistake. I know there are other reasons, but you'd get a young officer there for 2 years, they'd get some skills in the language, start making contacts, and then be shipped off to Russia or something like that. I don't know the bigger picture, but I believe that there ought to be maybe another year in those first assignments, that we ought to make certain that there's a liberal opportunity to really get good at the language more than we do.

I was irritated sometimes about how what I used to call the "GLOB," the State Department Personnel Office, would make decisions about who came and went from my embassy. For example, when we came up to the time of the auto negotiations, in the month or two previous to those negotiations, every one of our top officers who was a specialist in that field got ordered somewhere else. Every one of them. There were 3 or 4 major principals that knew all about it. Out they went. I called the GLOB and said, "You can't do this to me." They did it to me. And as a matter of fact, they sent word back they didn't appreciate my calling. It's kind of a headless operation. I think there needs to be some way... You can't have politicians running- (end of tape)

Q: And in fact, representation budgets, for example, are crucially important. In this law firm where we are conducting this interview, I'm sure you'd take your colleagues and your business partners out to lunch, but according to Congressman Rooney, he wasn't about to let those striped pants Foreign Service officers spend good taxpayer money on a function which we know is enormously invaluable in making human contact.

MONDALE: That's right.

Q: Which speaks to the issue of public support for diplomacy.

MONDALE: And public understanding of what diplomats do.

Q: Yes. And that comes at you in a number of ways. When I would come back from a tour, I'd call the public affairs guys and say, "Okay, I'm back in Seattle. I'll do some public speaking for you." "Well, now there's no budget for that." So, the American public is denied in one sense the knowledge that their sons and daughters from Washington state and Minnesota and Arizona are Foreign Service officers. There still are lots of people who don't understand the broad base of the Service itself.

MONDALE: Also, 9/11 and what did we learn about those risks? What could we have learned about those risks if we had better language officers around the world? How are we going to deal with this growing threat of terrorism from around the world that's more and more apparent if we don't have people who can participate in trying to find out and protect us? I'm not just talking about the CIA, although that's part of it. This is also a part of every State Department and other official overseas. How good are we and how fully do we support decent efforts to get in there where you can hear and learn about these things and to protect America?

Q: Or make the friends that are going to give you the platforms to fulfill American foreign policy goals?

MONDALE: Yes. This is a national security issue.

Q: By the time Secretary Powell take up his assignment,, various gold ribbon studies suggested that the State Department foreign service personnel was up to 1,000 officers short. That was the peace dividend which Congress collected during the previous decade. A thousand people for 3M, nobody would even notice. But the Foreign Service is only approximately 5,200 people, so if you're missing 1,000 and you have to rotate people and nobody gets language. Secretary Powell, in fact, has spent the time to encourage Congress restore most of that funding.

MONDALE: Yes, and that's great.

Q: But that's all part of the key: public understanding of that diplomacy function.

MONDALE: Right. And I think that's got to be worked on. I would have to say, I don't think the public understanding of what we're talking about is very deep.

Q: One could question the level of public discussion of foreign affairs, but I wonder about how issues are framed once they become part of domestic politics. Would you really get a domestic politician saying, "Well, we have to listen to the other guy, find out his interests?" Probably not because the politician from the opposite party would take a contrary position and say, "Ah, no, whack him on the other side of the head. The U.S. must be shown to be winning."

MONDALE: There is a current fever that may be abating that supports the idea that it's only simplistic macho slogan-type certainty that can tap American strength and influence abroad. It's the only thing that guarantees that we've got a he-man at work, that subtlety and nuance, the sorts of things that the best officers in the State Department help us achieve, are things that diminish national strength. I think that is horribly distorted to the point of risking national security, that understanding other their languages, their histories, their compulsions, how their systems work, what's driving their sentiment, all of those things must be understood in order to be strong.

Q: You would assume that would be an easy lesson for a commercial market society as ours to understand.

MONDALE: Because every businessman knows that.

Q: Exactly. And every businessman listens to his salesmen who ihis feedback mechanism to the market. And if the salesmen comes back and say, "Hey, boss, I can sell more of these things, but you're got to paint them purple instead of blue," does the boss say, "Hey, that's fine because understanding our customers is going to make us rich?" Well, what if you get the response, "Well, my grandfather set up this company three generations ago and we've been making blue widgets and we'll never..." You'd go out of business if you don't listen to the customers.

MONDALE: That's right.

Q: In our own world of commercialism and advertising we see people spending enormous amounts of money influencing other people after studying what the consumer wants.

MONDALE: To me, it's a question of respect. What I tried to do when I was ambassador was take every opportunity I had to build the sense that my interlocutors are people I respected and a country that I respected with a history that I respected with a potential that I respected. And you could feel it. I used to tell American VIPs when they came through and they always had these talking points that you guys had prepared for them and he'd say, "Well, I've got these 7 points..." I'd say, "Okay, that's good, but here's what I suggest. When this meeting starts, introduce yourself, tell them how happy you are to be there, and listen to him, let him talk. He may not want to talk, but the fact that you wanted to hear from him first will be noted by him and it'll make it easier for you to give your points than if you start right out, "This is our agenda." It's a respect thing. I believe that that's the great strength of America. There is an inexhaustible supply of dignity around. You can give it to people and there is more around to give to other people. You can show respect without reducing your supply of respect. And the idea that America wants to like others and to work with others wherever we can because we like them or we respect them is a subtle but powerful tool for us and for our future.

Q: When you were Ambassador, did you have the opportunity to have small groups into the residence and have these kinds of informal contacts?

MONDALE: I did. I would meet with them. We'd go out for dinner, which I liked. We would have them in the embassy. I'd meet them in their offices. We had sort of routine things like, I'd always have breakfast every week or every month with the vice minister of foreign affairs. We really tried to make these things go.

Q: So there was a regular pattern of interaction that you had set up so that was available to you if something were to-

MONDALE: Right. And I would go around and meet all the ministers. I'd go to the party headquarters and meet the leaders. You know what the ambassador does.

Q: But does the public know what the ambassador does, sitting there regally in his office? As you're saying, most of the gentlemen I worked with saw their job as getting out and creating a presence for the United States and a reputation. We would have small dinner parties at the ambassador's residence for key people. Again, that's what one does in a commercial society to maintain a human relationship with the client. It's just good business.

MONDALE: I think that commercial analogy is a very good one because people can understand what they're doing. But it leaves me a little cold because I think there's things about human connections that isn't commercial - I realize you're not saying that that go more to respect and human vibes or something. But I placed a lot of emphasis on that. I think there's something about living the life of a politician, if you're any good at it, that you find that side of human nature is... If you go at it right, you'll see the power of trust and respect to do things that you need to get done and may be difficult.

Q: The kinds of issues that you dealt with sort of had a natural life in and of themselves sometimes. But were there things that sprang from the American political process that some lobby group got in or something like that and this was a new issue then for you?

MONDALE: I felt like I was America's desk officer. You had a lot of people with a lot of agendas that would try to come in through different agencies or come to us directly to push their agenda. It might be a commercial agenda. It might be a weapon they wanted to sell. It might be any number of things. I always felt that it was my duty to look at the total relationship and respond to them based on what I thought best served our country. If I didn't like the idea, I didn't think it helped, I'd sometimes tell them. Sometimes I wouldn't tell them, I'd just handle it that way. I'd get orders, "Take this immediately to the prime minister" on something I knew was not appropriate at that level and something I knew the prime minister would think I was crazy, so I'd say, "We're going to get right to it" and I'd send some lower level assistant over there and tell them to leave a message or something. You had to do that. I think that's how an ambassador has to operate. If the government doesn't think he's doing it well, get somebody else, but I don't think you can just let this stuff come unfiltered into the country.

Q: Isn't that just the key thing that an ambassador offers, prioritizing your messages and making sure that they have the proper effect that you want?

MONDALE: Right. And sometimes you can't get decisions out of the government that have to be made quickly. When that girl was raped, I immediately apologized. I didn't wait for instructions from the federal government. I just went out and did it. When they had the 1995 annual memorial service for those killed in the firebombings of Tokyo that terrible night, I went to it. I wasn't taking sides in the war, but I let them know that Americans were sorry about what happened to innocent people, and I know it made a difference. I got a lot of bad mail from over here, but it was something that made us human, it showed that we cared, and I just did it.

Q: And of course handling the 50th anniversary of the end of the war was... There were ceremonies all over the place.

MONDALE: All over, but this was different. This one involved America's bombing Tokyo. I wasn't going to review that issue, but I wanted them to know that we were sorry that innocent people were killed. I think I got away with it.

Q: Well, I appreciate, Sir, this opportunity to review with you your experiences in foreign affairs. Thank you.

Biographic Sketch

Walter F. Mondale's record of public service includes: vice president of the United States, U.S. ambassador to Japan, and U.S. senator and attorney general for the State of Minnesota. He was also the Democratic Party's nominee for U.S. president in 1984. He is currently a partner with the law firm of Dorsey & Whitney LLP, headquartered in Minneapolis with 16 offices worldwide. He serves as chair of the firm's Asia Law Practice Group.

In March 1998, serving as President Clinton's special envoy, Mondale traveled to Indonesia to meet with then-President Suharto regarding the Asian financial crisis and economic reforms in Indonesia.

Walter Frederick ("Fritz") Mondale was born in Ceylon, Minnesota, on January 5, 1928, the son of Theodore Sigvaard Mondale and Claribel Cowan Mondale. He spent his boyhood in the small towns of southern Minnesota, where he attended public schools. After he helped manage Hubert H. Humphrey's first successful U.S. Senate campaign in 1948, he earned his BA in political science from the University of Minnesota in 1951. After completing service as a corporal in the U.S. Army, he received his LLB (cum laude) from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1956, having served on the law review and as a law clerk in the Minnesota Supreme Court.

Mondale practiced law for the next four years in Minneapolis. In 1960, Minnesota Governor Orville Freeman appointed him to the position of State attorney general. Mondale was then elected to the office in 1962, and served until 1964, when Governor Karl Rolvaag asked him to fill the U.S. Senate vacancy created by Hubert Humphrey's election to the vice presidency. The voters of Minnesota returned Mondale to the Senate in 1966 and 1972.

During his 12 years as a senator, Mondale served on the Finance Committee, the Labor and Public Welfare Committee, Budget Committee, and the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee. He also served as the chairman of the Select Committee on Equal Education Opportunity and as the chairman of the Intelligence Committee's Domestic Task Force.

Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale were elected president and vice president of the United States on November 2, 1976. On the president's behalf, Mondale traveled extensively throughout the country and the world advocating U.S. policy. He was the first vice president to have an office in the White House, and he served as a full-time participant, advisor, and troubleshooter for the Administration. During this period, Joan Mondale served as a national advocate for the arts, and was honorary chairman of the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities.

In 1984, Mondale was the Democratic Party's nominee for president of the United States. Following that election, Mondale practiced law, taught, studied, traveled and served as a director of both non-profit and corporate boards. He returned to his native Minnesota in 1987, where he practiced law with the firm of Dorsey & Whitney until President Clinton nominated him to the U.S. Ambassador to Japan.

Mondale served as ambassador to Japan from August 13, 1993, to December 15, 1996. During that period, he helped to negotiate several U.S.-Japan security agreements, including a resolution to the controversy about the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. He also helped to negotiate numerous trade agreements between the United States and Japan, and he promoted the expansion of educational exchanges between the two nations. In addition, he attended the annual APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Corporation) summit meetings in Seattle, Jakarta, Osaka, and Manila.

Since returning from Japan, Mondale has become a director of several non-profit and corporate boards. The non-profit boards include the Japan Society, Mayo Foundation, Minnesota Public Radio and the University of Minnesota Foundation. His corporate board memberships include the BlackRock Funds, Northwest Airlines, and UnitedHealth Group. Mondale also serves as senior Japan advisor to Goldman Sachs & Co.

Mondale currently serves on the executive committee of the Peace Prize Forum, an annual conference co-sponsored by the Norwegian Nobel Institute and five Midwestern colleges of Norwegian heritage.

In 1997 and 1998, Mondale served as co-chair (with former Republican Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker) of the independent, bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Project. This national project was supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts and staffed by the Aspen Institute in Washington, D.C.

Prior to his appointment as U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Walter Mondale was a Distinguished University Fellow in Law and Public Affairs at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. In 1990, he established the Mondale Policy Forum at the Humphrey Institute to bring together leading scholars and policymakers for conferences on domestic and international issues.

Mondale is married to the former Joan Adams. They have three children and three grandchildren.

Mondale has authored the book *The Accountability of Power: Toward a Responsible Presidency* and has written numerous articles on domestic and international issues. In his free time, he enjoys fishing, reading Shakespeare and historical accounts, barbecuing, skiing and tennis.

End of interview